

What is claimed is:

1 1. A communication method comprising the steps of:
2 receiving an instant messaging (IM) message from a sender to a recipient;
3 waiting a predefined time interval for an input from the recipient, the input being
4 responsive to the IM message; and
5 automatically replying to the IM message in the absence of an input from the
6 recipient during the predefined time interval.

1 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of replying to the IM message
2 comprises the step of:
3 providing a message indicating the recipient's unavailability to engage in an IM
4 chat session.

1 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of replying to the IM message
2 comprises the step of:
3 providing a message requesting the sender to wait for a predetermined time
4 period.

1 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of replying to the IM message
2 comprises the step of:
3 periodically providing messages, the messages being periodically provided at
4 predefined time intervals, each message indicating the recipient's unavailability to engage
5 in an IM chat session during the corresponding predefined time interval.

1 5. A communication method comprising the steps of:
2 receiving an instant messaging (IM) message from a first sender to a recipient;
3 determining whether the recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with second
4 sender; and
5 automatically replying to the IM message in response to determining that the
6 recipient is engaged in the IM chat session with the second sender.

1 6. The method of claim 5, further comprising the step of:
2 waiting a predefined time interval prior to replying to the IM message.

1 7. The method of claim 5, further comprising the step of:
2 indicating to the first sender that the recipient is engaged in an IM chat session
3 with the second sender.

1 8. The method of claim 5, further comprising the step of:
2 periodically providing messages to the first sender, the messages being
3 periodically provided at predefined time intervals, each message indicating the recipient's
4 unavailability to engage in an IM chat session during the corresponding predefined time
5 interval..

1 9. The method of claim 5, further comprising the step of:
2 indicating to the first sender that the recipient is unavailable to engage in an IM
3 chat session with the first sender.

1 10. A computer-readable medium comprising:
2 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to receive an
3 instant messaging (IM) message from a sender to a recipient;
4 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to wait a
5 predefined time interval for an input from the recipient, the input being responsive to the
6 IM message; and
7 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to reply to the
8 IM message in the absence of an input from the recipient during the predefined time
9 interval.

1 11. The computer-readable medium of claim 10, further comprising:
2 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to provide a
3 message indicating the recipient's unavailability to engage in an IM chat session.

1 12. The computer-readable medium of claim 10, further comprising:
2 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to provide a
3 message requesting the sender to wait for a predetermined time period.

1 13. The computer-readable medium of claim 10, further comprising:
2 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to periodically
3 provide messages, the messages being periodically provided at predefined time intervals,
4 each message indicating the recipient's unavailability to engage in an IM chat session
5 during the corresponding predefined time interval.

1 14. A computer-readable medium comprising:
2 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to receive an
3 instant messaging (IM) message from a first sender to a recipient;
4 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to determine
5 whether the recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with second sender; and
6 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to reply to the
7 IM message in response to determining that the recipient is engaged in the IM chat
8 session with the second sender.

1 15. The computer-readable medium of claim 14, further comprising:
2 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to wait a
3 predefined time interval prior to replying to the IM message.

1 16. The computer-readable medium of claim 14, further comprising:
2 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to indicate that
3 the recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with the second sender.

1 17. The computer-readable medium of claim 14, further comprising:
2 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to periodically
3 provide messages to the first sender, the messages being periodically provided at
4 predefined time intervals, each message indicating the recipient's unavailability to engage
5 in an IM chat session during the corresponding predefined time interval..

1 18. The computer-readable medium of claim 14, further comprising:
2 computer-readable code adapted to instruct a programmable device to indicate that
3 the recipient is unavailable to engage in an IM chat session with the first sender.

1 19. A communication system comprising:
2 means for receiving an instant messaging (IM) message from a sender to a
3 recipient;
4 means for receiving an input from the recipient in response to the IM message;
5 means for determining whether the recipient has provided an input during a
6 predefined time interval; and
7 means for replying to the IM message in response to determining that the recipient
8 has not provided an input during the predefined time interval.

1 20. A communication system comprising:
2 instant-messaging (IM) receive logic configured to receive an IM message from a
3 sender to a recipient;
4 input-receive logic configured to receive an input from the recipient in response to
5 the IM message;
6 determining logic configured to determine whether the recipient has provided an
7 input during a predefined time interval; and
8 reply logic configured to reply to the IM message in response to determining that
9 the recipient has not provided an input during the predefined time interval.

1 21. The system of claim 20, wherein the determining logic comprises:
2 a timer configured to track elapsed time from a receiving of an IM message.

- 1 22. The system of claim 20, wherein the reply logic comprises:
- 2 message-generation logic configured to generate a message, the message being
- 3 indicative of the recipient's unavailability to engage in an IM chat session.